

Public Hearing on:
House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
(Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Department of Developmental Services)

DATE: February 24, 2022

TO: Appropriations Committee, Health Subcommittee

FROM: David Porteus, Portland Connecticut

RE: **House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023**

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is David Porteus, and I would like to offer my perspective on H.B. 5037 and funding for non-profit groups.

I am speaking today as an individual, but by way of background:

- I am the parent of a 37-year-old autistic man who has received services from eight different DDS-funded non-profit groups over the last 16 years.
- I am also a member of the board of directors of two other agencies, Oak Hill and Gilead Community Services, that between them provide services to 40,000 individuals and receive funding from DDS, DMHAS and DCF.

First, I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment for community nonprofits that you fought to include in last year's budget. After the preceding 14 years of "flat funding" it was a sound and welcomed sign of support. Thank you.

I'm here this afternoon to echo the request you'll undoubtedly hear from others, namely, to continue those efforts, to provide an additional 8% in Fiscal Year 2023 funding and to support several mental health initiatives the Governor has recommended in response to recent demand, specifically:

- Expanding Mobile Crisis services
- 26 new community placements from CVH and Whiting
- Funding to place peer support specialists in Connecticut's 12 busiest hospitals.
- Funding of "downstream" costs that these programs will generate.

Why am I requesting this?

Non-profits have been straining for years to make ends meet in an environment where state funding typically covers only 95% of the cost of the services they provide. COVID has both increased the need for many of these services— most notably in the mental health arena – and highlighted the underlying financial issues non-profit agencies face.

From the perspective of both board seats and parental involvement, I cannot sufficiently thank the staff I have worked with over the years for their dedication and competence. Yet clearly, staffing has become the number one issue at every agency I have spoken with recently. Years of State underfunding coupled

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with the impact of COVID-19 has led to a crisis and a 20% vacancy rate for many. This is simply not sustainable.

This situation will not clear up on its own; we must address the chronic underfunding of these services.

However, I urge you not to consider this as simply an issue of staffing, perhaps one that can be fixed with just a few union contract adjustments for front line workers. Agency costs overall have increased dramatically, and any COLA calculations must be based on what it actually costs to run these programs – including things like rent, heating costs, utilities, transportation, maintenance as well as staff in finance, HR and other support roles.

As you consider appropriation options, please ensure

1. That COLA increases cover all the costs of providing contracted services,
2. That agencies have discretion to use the increases in the manner they feel will best help their operations, and
3. That funds are disbursed to the agencies in a timely manner. (Some agencies, for example, are still waiting for last July's 4% increase.)

We all want to provide superior services to our clients, pay our employees appropriately and maintain healthy organizations for the future. In a time of 6% inflation, we cannot do so without your support.

I greatly appreciate the chance to speak today. Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter – and for your service to the State.

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